

REMARKS

First, Applicants note with appreciation the indication that Claims 2 and 4 contain allowable subject matter (page 6, numbered paragraph 5 of the Official Action).

Claims 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, and 17-21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over JP 11-282163 to Toshiaki et al. (hereinafter referred to as “Toshiaki”). Claims 1, 5-11, 13-15, and 17-21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over EP 908783 to Watanabe et al. (hereinafter referred to as “Watanabe”) in view of Toshiaki. Claims 1, 3 and 5-21 have also been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,136,500 to Koboyashi et al. (hereinafter referred to as “Koboyashi”) in view of Toshiaki. Each of the aforementioned rejections is respectfully traversed.

The limitations of Claim 2 have been incorporated into independent Claim 1. As set forth above, Claim 1 has been indicated to contain allowable subject matter. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Claim 1 as amended is patentable over the cited references. Claims 3-21 depend either directly or indirectly from Claim 1 and are therefore also patentable over the cited references for at least the reasons set forth above.

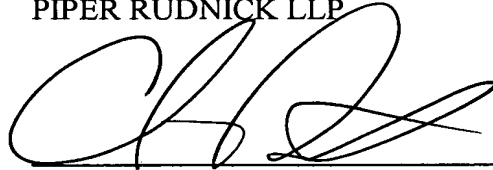
The amendments to the claims are being made without prejudice or disclaimer in order to expedite prosecution.

Claim 22 has been added. This claim defines the subject matter of original Claim 4 which claim has also been indicated to contain allowable subject matter. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Claim 22 as amended is also patentable over the cited references.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above, Applicants submit that this application is now in condition for allowance and therefore request favorable consideration. If any issues remain which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephonic interview, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact Applicants' counsel, Christopher W. Raimund at (202) 861-3896.

Respectfully submitted,
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Kelber', is written over a horizontal line.

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